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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002231

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: POLLS SHOW DISENGAGEMENT PLAN WINNING LIKUD
MAJORITY

REF: A. TEL AVIV 2206

[B](#). TEL AVIV 2199

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Polls conducted after the April 14 meeting between President Bush and PM Sharon show Sharon's disengagement plan winning a majority of Likud voter support. Major media analysts, however, noted that intervening events -- such as a significant terrorist attack or FinMin Benyamin Netanyahu's public opposition to the plan -- could threaten the plan's approval in the planned May 2 Likud referendum on the issue. Likud campaigns for and against the plan are underway, with PM Sharon's son, Omri, threatening fellow Likud politicians on April 15 that the PM may resign if the referendum fails to back the plan. End summary.

Polls Show Clear Majority for Plan

[2](#). (U) According to three media polls conducted on April 15, PM Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan, the contents of which has appeared in the April 16 press, enjoys the support of a majority of Likud's some 200,000 registered members:

-- Private poll broadcast by IDF radio: 57.5 percent of Likud voters support the plan, 37.5 percent oppose it and 5 percent are undecided.

-- Yedioth Ahronoth poll: 54 percent of Likud voters support the plan, 32 percent are opposed and 14 percent are undecided.

-- Ma'ariv poll: 49.4 percent of Likud voters support the plan, 38.4 percent are against and 12.2 percent are undecided.

[3](#). (C) While the polls indicate a comfortable majority for the plan, Uri Rosen, writing for Ma'ariv on April 16, cautioned that "almost any unexpected event, ranging from a public statement by Netanyahu against the plan to a terror attack staged especially on the day of the vote could change the picture." Rosen, however, discounted the assertion by some observers that disengagement opponents are more likely to actually vote than supporters of the plan. According to Rosen, a Ma'ariv examination of poll results indicates that "contrary to the arguments raised by Netanyahu's people over the past few days, (note: -- and contrary to what Omri Sharon asserted to poloff on April 14 per ref A) the supporters of the disengagement plan (will) vote at nearly the same level of participation as the plan's opponents...." Rosen also noted that it may take some time before the positive effect of the Bush-Sharon meeting "trickles down to public opinion" causing a possible "soar" in support.

Bibi and Omri Playing All the Cards

[4](#). (SBU) Yedioth Ahronoth reported on April 16 that "close associates" of FinMin Netanyahu indicated the Finance Minister would oppose the plan "unless he gets a satisfactory answer to the central question of the separation fence and whether the settlement blocs will be inside the fence." Netanyahu reportedly told Sharon in a telephone conversation while the PM was in Washington that the withdrawal plan should not be implemented until the fence is complete. Yedioth reported that "sources in Sharon's bureau admitted" that if Netanyahu uses "all his political clout" against the plan, Sharon may find it "difficult to pass the plan in the referendum and the Cabinet."

[5](#). (C) Sharon has already spoken with other Likud ministers and political leaders (ref B) about the plan and intends to meet with ministers, most likely on Sunday, April 18. Two key ministers, Limor Livnat and Silvan Shalom, have said that they will take a position on the plan after they learn more about it directly from the PM. Sharon is widely believed to have already lined up Labor to take the place of the National Union coalition partner if the cabinet approves the plan. (Note: National Union Chairman Avigdor Lieberman announced on April 16 that his party would leave the coalition "as soon as the plan is approved.") The Knesset, now in recess, has scheduled an extraordinary session on April 22 to learn directly from the PM about his plan. Shinui MK Ehud Rassabi

told poloff on April 15 that he was confident Sharon's plan would get through the referendum and asserted that Netanyahu would "definitely support the plan."

16. (C) Likud MK Omri Sharon, who has joined with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz (ref A) and other Likud members to campaign for the plan, has, according to Ha'aretz, been meeting with local Likud branch heads warning them that the prime minister would resign if the disengagement plan is not approved in the referendum and alluding to the loss of Likud's 40 Knesset seats and new elections if his father resigns.

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LeBaron